1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-6 (1907-1909) 1911
AIS Vedda AIS

511 them was their unbounded apathy and utter lack of interest. Although we came upon them unexpectedly, and although, as they told us later, they had never before seen white people, nevertheless, neither of them showed the slightest astonishment or interest in our appearance; both glanced up for a second, and then cast down their eyes, and continued silently shelling the seeds of the lotus pods beside them, and stirring the simmering pot over the fire. Near the other huts, women and children were occupied at the same task; some were sitting on the ground around a pile of lotus pods, others were attending to the cooking. At first the children seemed a little frightened at us, but contrary to expectation, did not rush off to the jungle....

511 "At the time of our visit there were but three men and 342 seventeen women and children in Maholagulla; these were distributed in five shelters or huts. The chief's house was made [184 of four upright posts and a flat thatched roof of palm leaves, but 622] without walls or flooring. The other huts were shaped like A-tents, one was thatched with coarse grass, the other covered with large circular leaves of the lotus. The remaining two huts were shaped like wall tents, the roofs of grass or palm-leaf thatch, and the walls of bark. They all had dirt floors, and not one of them was over eight feet square. In three of the huts the utensils, such as earthen pots, baskets, gourds and mats, were piled on the ground at one end; in only two were there any [356 shelves. The floor of each, however, was neatly swept, and even outside the huts, where all but the aged and the very young slept, the ground had been swept clear of leaves and twigs.

511 "The cooking was all done out of doors, at a fire-place consisting of three stones; and the cook was honoured by 352 having a seat, either a block of wood or the dried skin of the 359 Axis deer or the Muntjac. We were also surprised to see their providence, in that they had quite a good-sized bundle of dry 364 firewood on store in the huts. We expected to find the village reeking with refuse and decaying game, of which we heard that they were fond, but the place was free from smells, and really 361 clean. The jungle at this spot was composed of large trees and

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

and ear-rings and necklaces. Sober, wistful children ate raw melons or fragments of *kurrukkan* cake as hard as brick, plastered over with flies.

Indian corn and *kurrukkan*, the staple food of these people, are prepared in a variety of ways. After soaking in water for twenty-four hours, they are reduced to flour, *kurrukkan* on grind-stones, maize with pestle and mortar, and eaten in one of three forms—*talapa*, *roti*, or *pittu* appetised with pungent sambols.

Let us look into one of their homes. It is windowless and dark, except for the light that comes between the bark-slats in a hundred dazzling shafts. There are two rooms; the inner small and narrow, the outer a larger living room with a single doorway protected by a two foot fence—a provision for the children. At one corner is a hearth underlying a low trestle bridging the wall angle, for drying flesh; at another a cage-work containing earthen pots and garish Allervale cups and plates. Hanging about the walls are rolled mats, oil bottles, baskets and clusters of sheathed corn cobs. Head-high is an open ceiling containing a jumble of things such as an old umbrella, wicker baskets, large earthen pots and gourds. On the floor is a large grind-stone, and littered about are shreds of mats, a deer skin or two, dirty cloths, a small pillow, a betel bag, a rush broom and a polished plank—certainly the most primitive chair imaginable. There is also a coconut-scraper of curious design, made of a serrated iron disc wedged into the outstanding limb of a triple-branched stem resting on its Y-shaped arms. Such are the appointments of a *chena* Vedda's domicile.

These communal dwellings stockaded against beast aggression in the heart of wild nature, the watch huts on the trees, the hallos all night, proclaim the incessant struggle between man and the animals in whose strong kingdom he is only a small unit. But for its inalienable hardships the life of this people makes a homely appeal to the human heart. Nature a capricious giver, bestows now abundantly now sparingly, and he who would wrest a living from her must have supple thews and great endurance.

Henanagalla was a place of antiquarian interest a few miles from Dolagalwella. On the summit of a large low rock in an undulating glade stood a broken dagaba completely obscured by a growth of big trees and scrub. Desultory worshippers had trussed up a slab for offerings of wild flowers. A low wall of hewn granite blocks surrounded the structure, and a half buried monolith or two peeped out of the ruin.

Descending from here and working round through a tangle of brush-wood, we came to a commodious cave quite forty paces long, showing the remains of enclosing and partitioning walls, a slotted stone for the support of a pillar and a large flat *puja* stone.

Besides these evidences of ancient occupation, were signs of more recent use. The cave was obviously a resort of monitor hunters. There were the long sticks with which the savoury creatures had been poked out of deep lairs, and cooking frames where they had been roasted. The floor was littered with their dry heads, corn-cobs and nut-shells.

But more interesting than all this were the crude drawings that adorned the inner dome. Here was a veritable gallery of untutored art, wrought with finger for brush and a mixture of ash and water for paint. There were the most primitive representations imaginable of leopards, elephants

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

front of it is a much chipped *opulu* tree from which the Veddas every now and then renew their chew. Throughout the day the surrounding woods echo to the voices of food-gatherers or the blows of axes, as combs are cut out of hollow trees. At fiful intervals the *kolong koha* (stork-billed king-fisher), lord of the rocky stream, raises a clamorous cry, or the wood-pecker startlingly proclaims to the world that it sees the great she-demon (*maha yakkini*). As evening comes, the *kotaha* (gekko) that shares the cave, drawls in quaint imitation of his name, "ko-tak-ko." The night is ushered in by the solemn notes of the night jar* and bell-like sounds of frogs. The crescent moon shines through the trees, peopling the forest with mysterious shadows. Strange noises are heard around, a breaking branch perhaps, a dropping stone, or an animal's foot-falls. Then the little one creeps to its mother whispering, "Mother, the *hetha*"; and she, fondling, replies, "Yes, it is the *hetha*, child; be still." Now fires are stirred, and the Veddas, couched on leaves, and doubled up under their meagre rags, lie as close to them as they dare. For the caves are cold at night even on the hottest day. And every now and then throughout the dark, one or other of them groans with the chill, gets up, pokes the fire, and snuggles nearer to it. Is it a wonder that ash is the morning mark of the Vedda and *Alu galge* a favourite name of his cave? By six, the morning mists have melted and the cave begins to warm.

*At dusk, and all through the night, Horsfield's night jar gathers into its rich liquid notes the silence and mystery of the forest. There is no jungle, however desolate, in which this ever welcome music is not heard. It is at once the curfew of the jungle, the embodiment of all the stealthy, nocturnal life in it, and the destiny and doom of it.

Putha-kath-peruwa (seven-sons-axe) is the Sinhalese name of the bird in perfect imitation of its cry; and the following story explains it.—A woman once sent her seven sons into the jungle to fell trees. One of the trees falling in their direction, the brothers attempted to shoulder it off and were all killed. The mother, having cooked the evening meal, waited at home for her sons. But as they did not return she went out to look for them, and found them all dead beside the fallen tree. Taking up an axe she killed herself and became this bird; and now from dusk till dawn she cries *putha-kath-peruwa* through the lonesome woods.